

VLR - 3-13-02  
NRHP - 6/6/02

(Rev. 10-90)  
NPS Form 10-900

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

### NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

#### 1. Name of Property

historic name James A. Fields House

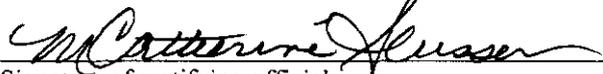
other names/site number 121-5004

#### 2. Location

street & number 617 27<sup>th</sup> Street not for publication N/A  
city or town Newport News vicinity \_\_\_\_\_  
state Virginia code VA county Newport News (Independent City) code 700 Zip 23607

#### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination      request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant      nationally      statewide X locally. (     See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

  
Signature of certifying official

April 18, 2002  
Date

**Virginia Department of Historic Resources**  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria. (     See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:      other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_  
     entered in the National Register  
     See continuation sheet.  
     determined eligible for the  
National Register  
     See continuation sheet. \_\_\_\_\_  
     determined not eligible for the National Register  
     removed from the National Register  
Signature of Keeper  
Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

U. S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

James A. Fields House  
617 27<sup>th</sup> Street, Newport News, Virginia

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property** (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property** (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	buildings
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	sites
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	structures
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	objects
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register   0  

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

  N/A  

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:   DOMESTIC   Sub:   Single Dwelling  

  HEALTH CARE     Hospital  

  COMMERCE/TRADE     Professional/Law Office  

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:   DOMESTIC   Sub:   Single Dwelling  

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



U. S. Department of the Interior  
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James A. Fields House  
617 27<sup>th</sup> Street, Newport News, Virginia

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage  
 Health/Medicine

Period of Significance 1897-1952

Significant Dates 1897

1908

1915

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Fields, James A.

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Unknown

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS)**

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Location of Additional Data**

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acres of Property 0.06

**UTM References** (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

1 18 373460 4093930 2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet.

U. S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

James A. Fields House  
617 27<sup>th</sup> Street, Newport News, Virginia

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Gregory Cherry \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_ N/A – Property Owner \_\_\_\_\_ date 1/15/02 \_\_\_\_\_

street & number: 617 27<sup>th</sup> Street \_\_\_\_\_ telephone (757) 245-1991 \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_ Newport News \_\_\_\_\_ state VA \_\_\_ zip code 23607 \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_\_ Gregory Cherry \_\_\_\_\_

street & number 617 27<sup>th</sup> Street \_\_\_\_\_ telephone (757) 245-1991 \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_ Newport News \_\_\_\_\_ state VA \_\_\_ zip code 23607 \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service**

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**James A. Fields House  
Newport News, VA**

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**7. Summary Description:**

The James A. Fields House, a single family dwelling, is located at 617 27th Street and Jefferson Avenue in the South East corridor in the City of Newport News, in an area called Madison Heights.

The Madison Heights community is a new middle class subdivision that is being redeveloped by the Newport News Housing Authority, with a variety of housing types and styles. Twenty-seventh Street is a one-way street that is lined with single-family dwellings that sit on 25x100 and 50x100 lots with the average age of 30 years. The James A. Fields House is the first residential property visible from the 27th Street interstate exit onto Jefferson Avenue, which was a major shopping district during the early years of the city. From the intersection of Jefferson Ave. and 27th Street it is apparent that this area was originally a residential/commercial business section of Newport News.

The James A. Fields House is an anchor of the Madison Heights community, in that it is one of the few remaining historic residential structures in the immediate area. The building is a red brick Italianate structure characterized by its prominent entry, original exterior features, and strong front façade. The dwelling includes a raised basement, the body of the house is two stories, and there is a typical Italianate tower that rises above the primary entry. The front façade of the residence includes two ten-foot tall two-over-two windows on the first floor, with two one-over-one windows on the second floor. The front porch has a massive square brick pier on either side of the steps leading up to a pair of paneled doors, with a semi-circular transom light over top and original exterior lights on either side. It is a side hall entrance, and has two exterior chimneys. The house has a standing seam metal roof, as well.

Many of the original features of the house were damaged or destroyed during a lengthy period of abandonment and poor maintenance. The building was unprotected from the elements for a number of years, and a major renovation was undertaken to stabilize and rehabilitate the property in 2000.

The house stands alone in a relatively barren landscape and currently undeveloped part of Newport News. There are few structures in the immediate area and, while the house still retains its relationship to the street and relates to the urban scene which directed its original design, the historic character in the immediate vicinity is no longer extant.

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Newport News, VA

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### Architectural Description

The late Victorian Italianate dwelling is centrally positioned on a 0.06 acre site with a 50x100 grass lot on the east and west side. Entrances into the house are on the front and rear. A few trees and the adjacent properties form a defining frame of the house. The site is flat. The standing seam metal roof is not visible from the street, though it is sloped equally on three sides; the tower has a low-pitched hipped roof. The two large brick exterior chimneys located on the west side of the house are equally spaced. Built in an urban environment, the dwelling is situated ten feet from the curb to the entrance way, and is primarily approached from the west side. Original construction consisted of exterior load-bearing masonry walls in a running bond pattern, with wood framing for the floors, interior walls, ceilings, and roof. The interior longitudinal walls are load bearing, while the transverse walls are non-load bearing partition walls.

Due to significant deterioration of the building, many of the original features were lost or damaged beyond repair. This is primarily attributable to the fact that the building sat unprotected from the weather for a number of years. Weatherproofing the building was done to prevent further deterioration. In addition, approximately one half of the exterior masonry was repointed, and all of it was cleaned and sealed. With the exception of the tower windows, all of the original exterior doors and windows were replaced. A new roof with appropriate flashing at all building joints was installed to prevent water-damage to the interior spaces. The roof wall junction has a wide eave overhang boxed with brackets. The decorative details along the east and west side of the front façade include a brick belt course below the second floor windows and rusticated quoins along each side of the house all the way up to the tower. The tower is placed alongside the front façade of the house with narrow paired windows with arched tops. The tower roof is low-pitched and hipped. Many of the original features in the house have been replaced due to deterioration and neglect. All exterior doors, and most windows have been replaced, as well as the gutter system.

Upon entry to the house, the floor plan is simple with a side hallway, and a living room and dining room located on the left. There is a parlor located to the rear of the house. The staircase leading up to the second floor is located beyond the entryway, and retains three-quarters of the original turned spindles in place along with the original newel post. A few of the original steps remain but most have been replaced. At the top of the stairs are a small hallway and a bathroom. To the left of the staircase is a narrow hallway that leads to the first and second bedrooms and the tower room.

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The basement serves as an office and kitchen. The office is accessible from inside the house, or from a secondary exterior door located underneath the primary entrance porch for the house. The kitchen, which is completely new, is located in the rear of the basement and is accessible from inside the house.

The original wood lathe and plaster has been replaced due to deterioration. New walls, ceilings, and floor finishes have been replaced throughout the structure. New mechanical, electrical, and plumbing system has been installed to meet current building codes. The existing rear porch has been replaced with a new wood deck.

Though six interior wood doors have been replaced, the pocket doors that separate the front room from dining room are original to the house and have been restored. Most of the wood trim, including the molding, has been replaced. New closets have been installed in each of the upstairs bedrooms with drywall. All old wiring has been replaced with new wiring & light fixtures, switches, receptacles and cover plates. The plumbing has been replaced, as well.

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**James A. Fields House  
Newport News, VA**

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Summary Statement of Significance:**

The James A. Fields House is historically significant for its long association with the development of social and civic life of the African-American community in Newport News, VA. Mr. Fields acquired the property at 617 27th Street in the year 1897 to use as his law office and primary residence until his death in 1903.<sup>1</sup> This address was just one of the fifteen properties owned by Mr. Fields in the city of Newport News. In the spring of 1887, he was elected Commonwealth's Attorney of Warwick County Va. In November 1889 he was Republican representative to the Virginia legislature.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Fields was instrumental in introducing a law now in the Code, to define the penalty of petit larceny.<sup>3</sup> (The theft of objects that is valued below a certain arbitrary standard).

The house also served as the beginning of the first black hospital in the city, which later became the Whittaker Memorial Hospital, one of the first black hospitals in the country during the early nineteen hundreds. The house is one of the few surviving buildings in this area from the early development of the city. As such it is a landmark and a reminder of the birth of the city, and the architectural style of that period of our nation's history. It also relates to other late 19th Century and early 20th Century historic structures along Jefferson Avenue on 25th and 28th streets in Newport News.

**Significance Statement:**

James A. Fields (1844-1903)- was born a slave in Hanover County, Virginia. Fields escaped along with his brother George to Elizabeth City County (Hampton), Virginia and found refuge at Fort Monroe during the civil war in 1862 as a "contraband of war". Fields found employment as a guide for the Union troops.<sup>4</sup> After the City of Hampton was burned in 1861, many slaves sought refuge at Fort Monroe. The American Missionary Association sent a minister and hired Mary S. Peake as the principal teacher at a new school for ex-slaves, under the protection of the Union Army.<sup>5</sup> While with the army and even in slave life, Fields had picked up some knowledge of reading, and now seized the chance to attend the "Butler School", taught by missionaries at Fort Monroe. When General Samuel Chapman Armstrong came to Hampton as Freedmen's Bureau Superintendent, he befriended Fields, gave him work at the Bureau storehouse, which was soon to become a part of the beginnings of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (Hampton University).<sup>6</sup>

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Newport News, VA**

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Fields was one of the first twenty pupils to enter Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in 1868. Graduating in its first class in 1871, Fields went to work to teach black school children between the ages of eight to sixteen. He taught for fourteen years in Elizabeth City County and in Williamsburg, and of his fifteen hundred pupils over one hundred became teachers in their turn because of his influence.<sup>7</sup>

Fields received his first legislative exposure when he was elected doorkeeper in the House of Delegates during the 1879-1880 legislative sessions. Nominated in the house by the Negro delegate, Robert Norton, he won the position by a vote of 47 to 31.<sup>8</sup> In 1879 he also served as a Justice of the Peace, thereby becoming Virginia's first black judicial officer. Fields soon opened his office to other blacks, allowing them to study law under his tutelage for three nights a week. Drawing on his formal legal training at Howard University, Fields taught his students the practice and theory of law. They all passed the bar examination on their first attempt.<sup>9</sup>

Fields served several terms in the General Assembly. He completed one of these terms in the same year that he entered Howard University's School of Law, which he graduated in 1881. From 1887-1889, he served as Commonwealth Attorney for Warwick County, Virginia; he left the position in 1889 when he was elected to serve as a representative in the General Assembly. Fields and John H. Robinson, another black lawyer, were the last two blacks to serve in the Virginia General Assembly for many years to come.<sup>10</sup> Upon his death, James A. Fields had amassed a fortune in real estate, including the house he constructed at 617 27<sup>th</sup> Street in Newport News.

The house returned to prominence in 1908, when a team of four doctors pioneered the establishment of the first hospital for blacks. Drs. W. T. Forman, W. P. Dickerson, W. W. Whittaker, and W. T. Jones pooled their savings and asked the Fields family to lease them the top floor at 617 27<sup>th</sup> Street to start a hospital.<sup>12</sup> The hospital was the genesis of an improved health care system for blacks in Newport News.

After two years of generous service to the black community the facility located in the James A. Fields House was forced to reorganize, because of the pressing need of financial support. Since this was the only place for blacks to receive care in Newport News (other than the jail infirmary), an intensive drive to raise funds for larger and better facilities was launched. Among the very many

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**James A. Fields House  
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active and conscientious workers was Mrs. C. j. Bolden, Mrs. W. P. Dickerson, and Mrs. Amanda Clarke. The untiring efforts of these ladies attracted help from the white citizens.<sup>13</sup>

In 1913 Dr. Clarence Porter Jones, Sr. obtained two lots from Mr. W. B. West, and one thousand dollars from Mr. Arthur Curtis James. On May 27, 1914 its charter and articles of incorporation were granted and in 1915 the foundation was laid for the first black hospital and nurse training school in Newport News, Virginia. In 1917 Whittaker Memorial Hospital was opened in the 1000 block of 29th Street. Because Dr. Whittaker died before the construction began, the hospital was named in his honor. In 1943 a new four-story hospital opened in the 1000 block of 28th Street. This building had the distinction of being the first hospital in the country designed by black architects.<sup>14</sup>

The hospital was able to give much needed service to members of the community for several years. During December 1944 the institution was full approved by the American College of Surgeons.<sup>15</sup>

In 1983 the hospital broke ground for a new facility at 51st Street and Marshall Ave. and changed its name to Newport News General Hospital. In 1997 the hospital closed its doors.

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**End Notes**

1. *Peninsula Directory (Newport News, Hampton, Chesapeake City and Old Point 1896-1897)* Newport News, VA, 65.
2. Clay J. Smith, Jr. Emancipation, The Making of the Black Lawyer 1844-1944. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 226.
3. Twenty-Two Years' Work of Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute at Hampton, VA. (Hampton, VA: Hampton Normal School Press, 1893), 25.
4. Luther Porter Jackson. Negro Officeholders In Virginia 1865-1895. (Norfolk, VA: Guide Quality Press, 1945) 17.
5. Felice Belman, "Teacher Educated Her Hampton Students for Eternity," *The Daily Press*, February 7, 1995, Local Section.
6. Twenty-Two Years' Work of Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute at Hampton, VA., 25.
7. Ibid, 25.
8. Negro Officeholders In Virginia 1865-1895, 17.
9. Emancipation, The Making of the Black Lawyer 1844-1944, 226.
10. Ibid, 226.
11. Twenty-Two Years' Work of Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute at Hampton, VA., 25.
12. John V. Quarstein and Parke S. Rouse, Jr. Newport News A Centennial History . (Newport News, VA: City of Newport News, 1996), 77.
13. Newport News 325 Years. (Newport News, VA: Newport News Golden Anniversary Corp., 1946), 229.
14. Ibid, 229.
15. Ibid, 229.

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Lovette, Lillian. Local historian, Hampton, Virginia. Interviewed by author. Winter 1997.

Newport News' 325 Years. 1946 (Newport News, VA: Newport News Golden Anniversary Corporation, 1946.

Newport News, VA. City of Newport News Real estate Assessor's Tax Assessment Records, 2001.  
Owens, Mac. Lived in immediate vicinity of James A. Fields House. Interviewed by author. July 2000.

Peck, Jeanne. "Newport News General Trying to Recover Financially," *The Daily Press*, May 5, 1996, Section E 1.

*Peninsula Directory (Hampton, Phoebus and Old Point 1897-1898)*, Newport News, VA.

*Peninsula Directory (Hampton, Phoebus and Old Point 1898-1899)*, Newport News, VA.

*Peninsula Directory (Newport News, Hampton, Chesapeake City and Old Point 1896-1897)*, Newport News, VA.

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Twenty-Two Years' Work of Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute at Hampton, VA.  
Hampton, VA: Hampton Normal School Press, 1893.

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

This lot 29, piece or parcel of land is situated in the East End of the City of Newport News, Virginia, as shown on the attached plat entitled "Gregory Cherry" dated 15 May 2000, being designated thereon as "0.06 acres" of land; it being the same property conveyed to Gregory Cherry by deed from the Newport News Redevelopment and housing Authority, Newport News, Virginia, dated December 20th, 1999.

Beginning at a point located S 63o 37' W 25.00' East along 27th Street. From the point of beginning S 26o 23' E 100.00' to a pin; thence N 63o 37' 25.00' East to a pin; thence N 26o 23' W 100.00' to a pin.

**Verbal Boundary Justification**

The 0.06 acres nominated includes the entire parcel historically associated with James A. Fields and the hospital which would later be known as Whittaker Memorial Hospital.

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All photographs are of:

JAMES A. FIELDS HOUSE  
Newport News, Virginia  
VDHR File Number: 121-5004  
Gregory Cherry, photographer

All negatives are stored in the archives of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

DATE: January 2002  
VIEW OF: Southwest Oblique  
NEG. NO: 19540  
PHOTO: 1 OF 4

DATE: January 2002  
VIEW OF: Exterior East Elevation  
NEG. NO: 19540  
PHOTO: 2 OF 4

DATE: January 2002  
VIEW OF: Exterior North Elevation  
NEG. NO: 19540  
PHOTO: 3 OF 4

DATE: January 2002  
VIEW OF: Interior Entry Hall and Stair  
NEG. NO: 19540  
PHOTO: 4 OF 4



James A. Fields House  
 Newport News, VA.  
 DHP # 121-5004



**BUILDINGS**



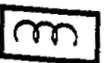
**PAVED ROADS**



**DRIVEWAYS OR PARKING LOTS**



**WATER BODIES**



**OTHER PAVED AREAS**



James A. Fields House  
Newport News, VA.  
18/373460/4093930  
VDHR #121-507

NEWPORT NEWS SOUTH QUADRANGLE  
VIRGINIA  
7.5-MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

